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SUBJECT: NEW MINISTERIAL STATEMENT LIKELY TO BE RETREAD OF
2008 STATEMENT

REF: BEIRUT 1225

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Thomas F. Daughton for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Ministers working on the committee drafting the new ministerial statement tell us that the final document will most likely resemble the text of the previous statement, accepted in 2008 following the Doha agreement. "There is a kind of understanding among all parties to use the same formula," new Labor Minister Boutros Harb told polchief on November 17. Harb emphasized that Prime Minister Saad Hariri was keen to finish the drafting process this week and had ordered the committee to meet daily. Harb also complained that Hariri, in his rush to rule, was not resisting initiatives from the opposition and Walid Jumblatt that weaken the statement. If the final statement is too weak on the issue of "the resistance" (i.e., Hizballah), Harb said, he and Kataeb representative Selim el Sayegh will vote for it only after formally noting their objections.

¶2. (C) The negotiations are moving very slowly, new Social Affairs Minister Selim el Sayegh told us November 17. El Sayegh, who is coordinating efforts with Harb, reported that both were pushing to weaken the "resistance" language. Expressing reservations during the final vote on the statement would not be effective, el Sayegh explained, adding that he feared that he and Harb would be "left alone" at the end of the process by Hariri's representatives. Both Harb and el Sayegh criticized Hariri's representative, caretaker Finance Minister Rayya Haffar al-Hassan, for being passive on political topics, and they cast aspersions on the Lebanese Forces' motives in not participating at all in the committee.

¶3. (C/NF) El Sayegh provided us with a copy of first draft of the statement, as crafted by Information Minister Tariq Mitri. Embassy's informal translation of the three key paragraphs on UN Security Council Resolution 1701, "the Resistance," and relations with Syria are below. We note that the text is similar to that of the 2008 statement, but simplified. We believe the final result will closely resemble this text, despite efforts from both sides to modify it:

-- Paragraph 5: Keeping in mind Lebanon's higher interests, the Lebanese government renews its respect for international law and its claims, working on the complete implementation of

its resolutions. The government will continue its demand on the basis of UNSCR 1701 for a permanent cease-fire and truce according to the Taif Agreement.

-- Paragraph 6: Starting with its responsibility for preserving Lebanon's sovereignty, stability, unity, and the peace of its land, the government affirms Lebanon's right, through its people, army, and resistance, to liberate or return Shebaa Farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills, and the Lebanese part of the village of Ghajar and to defend Lebanon in confrontation with any aggression, as well as its insistence on its rights to its waters, by any legitimate, available means. It also affirms its obligation to UNSCR 1701 and all its inclusions. It also affirms its work on behalf of drafting a complete national strategy for protecting Lebanon and defending it, as agreed upon in the National Dialogue.

-- Paragraph 8: The government looks forward to strengthened relations with its brother Syria on the basis of mutual respect and trust, on a fixed foundation, especially on the basis of equality, which requires the exchange of diplomatic representation. The government will work on addressing shared issues and differences, among them controlling the borders and their demarcation and addressing the issue of missing persons in the spirit of guarding the interests of the two countries and their citizens.

14. (C) COMMENT: Both Harb and el Sayegh reported that they would meet with Hariri, former PM Fouad Siniora, and March 14 Secretary General Fares Souaid on the evening of November 17 to decide a mutual strategy. Although some of Hariri's allies are unhappy with what they describe as his passivity

and neutrality, we assess that they will fall in line to support the existing language.

DAUGHTON